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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 003027

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SUBJECT: CHEN PLAYS PRESIDENTIAL CARD AS PROTESTERS PREPARE
TO LAUNCH RALLIES

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young, Reason 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: President Chen is going forward with his long-planned trip to visit diplomatic partners Palau and Nauru Sept 3-6 in an effort to bolster Taiwan's ties to its allies in the South Pacific. In so doing, Chen aims to highlight his determination to forge on as President in the face of continuing calls for his resignation. Protest demonstrations by "anti-Chen" groups, most notably the "Depose Chen" campaign led by former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairman Shih Ming-te, will begin Friday evening, Sept 1, and continue through the weekend and over the next four weeks. While disappointment with Chen continues within the ruling pan-Green camp, we see no signs that he or his key supporters are going to buckle under the additional pressure from Shih's movement. End Summary.

Chen Plays Presidential Card

12. (C) President Chen will depart on Sunday, Sept 3, on "Air Force One" for Palau to attend a Sept 4 summit meeting of the heads of state of Taiwan's six diplomatic partners in the South Pacific. This trip was planned to shore up Taiwan's ties with its South Pacific allies. Chen will then proceed to Nauru on Sept 5 before returning to Taipei via Guam the following day. National Cheng-chih University Professor Yen Chen-shen told AIT that this first-ever summit with Pacific island allies is an effort to counter Beijing's push deeper into the region. Of particular concern here has been Premier Wen Jiabao's attendance earlier this year at a forum of PRC allies in the region and his announcement of a major aid and economic investment package in May.

13. (C) Chen's decision to proceed with his long-scheduled visit highlights to domestic audiences his continuing fulfillment of presidential responsibilities despite the growth of a "Depose Chen" movement that will kick off demonstrations this weekend. Staffers of ruling DPP Legislator Hung Chi-chang told AIT Aug 31 that Chen's visit is intended to reinforce his declaration that he will not step down. Chen intends to serve out his full term and to highlight his continuing leadership, especially on national defense and foreign policy issues. The President's strategy, the staffers explained, is to portray continuing

self-confidence to both his supporters and his critics.

¶4. (C) The timing of the trip between the start of anti-Chen pep rallies Sept 1 and larger demonstrations planned for Sept 9, though long planned, could also help deflate the "Depose Chen" movement. Most Taiwan press headlines today, Sept 1, focused on President Chen's South Pacific trip and his Guam transit, relegating reports of tonight's anti-Chen demonstrations to the inside pages. Presidential Office General Secretary Mark Chen told AIT that negotiations in early August between the Presidential Office and Shih Ming-te, former DPP chairman and leader of the "Depose Chen" movement, were not successful in reaching a compromise that would give Shih a way to back out without losing face. (Note: Since launching his movement Shih has vowed that the "Depose Chen" demonstrations will continue until Chen steps down and has publicly stated "if you (Chen) do not fall, then I (Shih) will be finished." End Note)

Shih Seeks to Maintain Protest Momentum

¶5. (C) Shih's "Depose Chen" campaign headquarters, for its part, has been struggling to maintain momentum after going over one week without any major rallies or events since its initial drive to collect NT\$100 million in contributions ended August 23. (Comment: In a bid to broaden the movement, the movement renamed itself the "Anti-Corruption" movement on Monday August 28, but the focus and endgame continues to be deposing Chen. End Comment) Soochow University Professor Emile Sheng, a long-time opposition pan-Blue contact who will serve as the movement's international press spokesman, told AIT on Aug 30 that the campaign decided to hold small-scale "trial" sit-ins each evening beginning Friday, Sept 1. They

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will continue until the main sit-in begins on Sept 9 in large part to avoid losing momentum and interest. Sheng noted that supporters, mostly from the opposition pan-Blue camp, have been pressing for action and are impatient with the length of time it has taken campaign headquarters to organize activities.

¶6. (C) The local press is reporting that some contributors are now demanding their money back, especially after Shih criticized opposition Kuomintang (KMT) Chairman and Taipei Mayor Ma Ying-jeou earlier this week for not issuing the movement a 24-hour sit-in permit. Ma had tacitly endorsed the movement earlier in the month by giving NT\$100 as a "private citizen." Deep-Blue People First Party (PFP) Legislator and James Soong confidant Daniel Hwang (Yih-jiau) told AIT on Aug 31 that he disagreed with the notion that Shih's movement was losing momentum. Huang estimated that the first day would draw as many as 15,000 participants.

¶7. (C) Shih's movement, nevertheless, will to some extent be competing for attention with other anti-Chen and pro-Chen activities planned by various groups over the next two weeks.

While some pan-Green contacts tell us that their biggest concern is the potential for peaceful demonstrations to turn violent, others are confident that Taiwan's democratic institutions are strong enough withstand this extra-legal attempt to remove the president. Optimists point to the calm and order evident on the streets of Taipei, as people go about their daily activities despite the media frenzy surrounding the "Depose Chen" movement.

Protest Schedule

¶8. (C) The schedule of announced protests over the next three weeks is fluid, continually changing, and complex, with demonstrations overlapping or abutting each other on the broad plaza-like Ketagalan Boulevard in front of the Presidential Office Building. As of Sept 1, Taipei police had issued the following permits for activities in and around

Ketagalan Bvd:

- Sept 1: "Democratic Night Market" on Ketagalan Bvd beginning at 19:00; organized by anti-Chen Democracy Action Alliance (DAA) to kick off weekend of anti-Chen protests.
- Sept 1-7: "Depose Chen" movement "trial" sit-in on Ketagalan Bvd. Each evening 18:00-22:00, 230 protesters will hold practice sit-ins in preparation for the 2,300-person sit-in scheduled to start Sept 9 (each protester symbolizes 1,000 of Taiwan's 2.3 million people).
- Sept 8: Pro-DPP Republic of Taiwan Society 09:30-16:00 demonstration on Ketagalan Bvd calling for establishing the "Republic of Taiwan." On this day, the "Depose Chen" movement will shift to adjacent Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Park.
- Sept 9-10: DAA anti-Chen rally on Ketagalan Bvd will share a demonstration permit with the "Depose Chen" sit-in, consisting of 2,300 people each evening 18:00-22:00, rotating 1-hour time slots.
- Sept 11-29: "Depose Chen" sit-in continues (no further information), 09:00-22:00 daily.
- Sept 16-20: "Democratic Forum" held by (pro-Chen) DPP Taipei Councilor Yen Sheng-kwang, possibly related to DPP twentieth anniversary; to be held just east of Ketagalan Bvd.
- Sept 30-
Oct 1: DPP Taipei Councilor Liu Yao-jen-organized Activity on Ketagalan Bvd.

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Comment

19. (C) As he confronts this movement to depose him, President Chen continues to play to his deep-Green core supporters and to the mainstream public by carrying on with his normal Presidential duties. Most pan-Green AIT contacts, while disappointed with Chen and the damage the ongoing allegations of corruption have caused to the ruling DPP, think Chen's strategy will allow him to ride out the political storm. They predict the movement to subside once the Legislature starts its session on Sept 19. For Shih and the "Depose Chen" movement, on the other hand, turnout for the trial sit-in and allied anti-Chen activities this weekend will be a key test of the depth of support for their cause.
YOUNG